

a year, a lifetime. by kdee

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Summary:

When El catches him staring, she's swiping a curl out of her face. Instinctively, she wonders whether she's said something wrong, but when she inquires he disagrees so vehemently that he goes pink in the face.

Or: Mike loves Eleven's new hair.

a year, a lifetime.

When El catches him staring, she's swiping a curl out of her face. Instinctively, she wonders whether she's said something wrong, but when she inquires he disagrees so vehemently that he goes pink in the face.

They hadn't been able to see each other as often as they both wanted after she closed the gate – Hopper had guarded the cabin for forty-eight hours like El was quarantined, whilst she had to eat canned chicken soup and dozed on and off during the day to recuperate. Not that Mike hasn't found ways around him. When Hopper is called off on a surprise meeting with Dr Owens on the third day, Mike trails his way through the woods, almost sets off the trip wire in his eagerness and then nervously puts his own secret knock into practice.

He thinks he might die when El opens the door and greets him with a tired but brilliant smile. The only way he can describe her is... soft. The diametric opposite of what he saw when they first reunited. Mike almost wonders if he's dreaming as he watches the late morning light catch her curls, hair that he's still not used to mussed from disturbed sleep. She's wearing *pajamas*.

"Mike?" El says. He blinks, as if suddenly realising where he is.

"I missed you," is all he musters before she's gathered in his arms and her breath catches in relief. Mike's arms feel like home, like she's already at 110%. She wonders whether it would be worth convincing Hopper to let Mike visit every day – she's absolutely sure that he speeds up her recovery. After closing the door behind him, El pulls him to the couch laden with blankets that she's been lying on to watch T.V and Mike makes a disgusted face at the half eaten canned soup residing on the table.

"I know," is all she can grumble in return. As she settles back under her blankets, Mike following her, she concedes with, "but Hopper says I need the... protein." As she smooths her hair out of her face, she looks at Mike. Staring at her.

"Did I... say it wrong?" El asks, trying to remember how Hopper

repeated it to her. But Mike immediately waves his hands, shaking his head furiously.

“No, no, it’s not...” He stammers, then looks at her face, then hair, then it’s as if his words stop working. *Your buzzcut has already grown out. It’s only been a year but it felt like a lifetime waiting for you.* Instead, he says “your hair.”

El reaches up and pats it, then looks at him, confused. Mike watches the way it frames her face, how prettily it curls around her ears.

“I really like it,” he elaborates, neck flushing. Cautiously, he inches closer to her, fingers ghosting over the curls. “It’s cute when it’s longer.”

El smiles and immediately understands without Mike even needing to really say it. She mirrors him and runs a finger through a lock of his black hair. “Yours grew a lot, too,” she whispers.

Mike cracks a smile, relieved. And then he remembers the slicked back hair from a few days ago.

“Looks different from a few days ago, actually.” He tries to suppress the grin that steals over his face. “Punk. Very cool.” El quirks a smile, looking up at him.

“Miss it?” She asks. There is a glint in her eyes, a look Mike has never seen before, full of mirth. A surprised laugh bubbles up through him when he realises she’s teasing him. A shy grin blooms over her face as Mike’s eyes shine at her, and she’s missed this. She’s missed *him*, so much.

Then, he catches her hands with his.

“Who were you with?” He murmurs. “Before.”

El becomes more sombre, staring at their joined hands. He gently squeezes her hands for reassurance, tracing a thumb over hers.

She looks up, eyes full of a year’s experience apart from him. And then they both start to slowly catch up, hands clutched together, comfort slowly seeping back into their frames.

Author's Note:

and that's it! i'm obsessed with the idea that mike can't get used to el's new hair and regularly gets distracted by it. thanks for coming to my ted talk.

my tumblr is hawkinsgf.tumblr.com
send me prompts if you want!

edit: i just realised HOW obsessed i am with this idea, so when i have time ill write more about mike being infatuated with el's curly hair in my newly created series just for this! subscribe to it if you'd like :-)